

The information is aggregated from open online sources and our own practice. In the newsletters, we will update you in brief on human rights violations in numbers and facts.

## **Saturday 30 November 2024 to Friday 13 December 2024**

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by the seventh stage of pardoning political prisoners, activist committing suicide due to political pressure, continuation of *in absentia* persecution and increased persecution of journalists, more harsh sentences for alleged cooperation with Ukrainian secret services.

### **Woman commits suicide due to political pressure**

On 10 December, media reported the tragic death of a resident of the Pinsk district, Svetlana Krutikova, who committed suicide by throwing herself under a train. Svetlana was known for her active civic position. In recent years she was arrested several times, including in November 2024, when she was tried for “dissemination of extremist materials” under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses. Svetlana's acquaintances are sure that her act was the result of unbearable pressure – the woman could not withstand searches, arrests, constant checks, and psychological pressure from the police in connection with her active position.

### **Seventh stage of pardoning political prisoners**

On 9 December 2024, Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree pardoning 29 more political prisoners. It is reported that 11 women and 18 men were pardoned, 15 of whom suffer from chronic diseases, 2 have disabilities, 6 are under 25 years old, and 3 are of retirement age. Thus, 207 political prisoners have been released during 7 stages of pardon since 3 July 2024. However, the pardons affected only a fraction of the total number of arbitrarily detained and unjustly convicted, while more people were convicted than released since the pardons began.

### **Persecution *in absentia* continues**

On 21 July 2022, Alexander Lukashenko signed Law No. 199-Z, which introduced the possibility to conduct special *in absentia* trials of people who are accused of “extremist” and “terrorist” crimes and reside outside Belarus. The Chairman of the Investigative Committee Dmitry Gora stated that one of the main goals of the adoption of this law was to create legal grounds for the confiscation of the property of political migrants. He believes that the conversion of such property into state income will allow “at least partially to cover the damage that has been done to the country.” According to the List of Persons Subject to Special Proceedings and Summoned by Criminal Prosecution Authorities, as of 29 November 2024, special proceedings have officially been initiated against 122 individuals in Belarus.

On 3 December 2024, the Minsk City Court *in absentia* sentenced the founders of the startup hub “Imaguru” Anastasia Khomenkova and Tatyana Marinich to 11 and 12 years in prison, respectively. The director of the organization Yevgeny Pugach, who has been in custody since July 2023, was sentenced to 4.5 years in prison. They were charged with “inciting enmity,” “tax evasion,” “conspiracy to seize power,” “calls to harm national security,” “participation in an extremist formation,” “discrediting Belarus,” and “abuse of office” under Articles 130, 243, 357, 361, 361-1, 369, and 424 of the Criminal Code. Since 2020, the organization has been continuously persecuted due to the political activity of its co-founder Tatyana Marinich, providing a platform for pro-democracy projects (member of the Opposition Coordination Council and the League of Student Association), as well as for

providing consultations for Belarusians who have suffered from violence and participated in strikes.

On 5 December 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated *in absentia* proceeding against the head of the BY SOL initiative Andrei Strizhak, members of the BY SOL team Alexander Kuzmenkov, Yaroslav Likhachevsky and Alexander Podgorny; the head and founder of the BY\_help foundation Alexei Leonchik, the head of the Belarusian Youth Hub Alexander Lapko, and activist and blogger Alexandra Zhuk. They were charged under 17 “extremist” articles of the Criminal Code, including “propaganda of terrorism,” “financing terrorist activity,” and “high treason” under Articles 289-1, 290-1 and 356 of the Criminal Code.

On 10 December 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated *in absentia* proceedings against Belarusian volunteers from the Kalinovsky regiment, Artem Bigel, Vyacheslav Granovsky, Ignatij Kireyev, Anastasia Makhomet, and Yan Melnikov. They were accused, depending on their role, of 11 “extremis” articles of the Criminal Code, including “including participation in the activities of a terrorist organization” and “conspiracy to seize power” under Articles 290-5 and 357 of the Criminal Code.

### **Harsh sentences for alleged cooperation with Ukrainian secret services**

On 2 December 2024, Gomel Regional Court sentenced Ukrainian Vyacheslav Borodiy and Belarusian Nikolay Losovsky to 10 years in prison, and Belarusian Valentina Poloz to 9 years in prison. Depending on their role, they were accused of “illegal actions regarding ammunition and explosives,” “illegal movement of weapons across the border,” “high treason,” “agent activity,” “illegal border crossing,” and “organizing illegal migration” under Articles 295, 333-1, 356, 358-1, 371, and 371-1 of the Criminal Code. They were detained in September 2023 in the case of “accomplices of the Security Service of Ukraine.” It is known that Borodiy was accused of transferring weapons and explosives to Belarus to allegedly organize sabotage on the territory of Belarus and Russia on the instructions of the Security Service of Ukraine.

On 4 December 2024, information was released that Mogilev Regional Court sentenced 19-year-old Minsk resident Daniil Harasim to 10 years in prison. He was accused of photographing missile and artillery facilities and subsequently transferring the photographs to Ukrainian special services, as well as assisting the Supraciu organization in the context of damaging railway tracks, under Articles 295, 356, and 361-3 of the Criminal Code.

### **Persecution of journalists continues**

On 10 December 2024, the Minsk City Court sentenced journalist Olga Rodionova to 4 years in prison. She was tried on charges of “inciting enmity,” “slander,” and “insult” against Lukashenko, “discrediting Belarus” under Articles 130, 367, 368, and 369-1 of the Criminal Code. The basis for the charge could have been her cooperation with the KYKY.org publication and other independent Belarusian media as a freelancer until 2020.

In early December 2024, mass detentions of employees and journalists of the local newspaper Intex-press, which was recognized as “extremist” and liquidated, took place in Baranovichi. Human rights activists know of at least 7 people detained in this regard on charges of “aiding extremist activity” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code.

### **Political prisoners**

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 1281. As of 13 December 2024, our colleague Nasta Lojka has been in custody for more than 2 years (808 days).